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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000214

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STATE PLEASE PASS TO USTR FOR RDRISCOLL  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SMIG](#) [EFIN](#) [SOCI](#) [BO](#) [LO](#)  
SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA POLITICAL ROUNDUP, MARCH 17, 2006

REF: A. BRATISLAVA 111  
[1](#)B. BRATISLAVA 167

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)  
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ACADEMICS RALLY AROUND SMER  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) At a March 13 seminar held by the new Smer-friendly ASA (Analysis, Strategy, Alternatives) think tank to provide input on the development of Smer's social policy programs, Slovakia's academics -- including the Rectors of two of Slovakia's most prestigious universities -- gathered to decry the lack of funding for education, science, and research and development (R&D). The academics drew from dated material (data from 1997-2000) showing the decrease in industry and state funded R&D, blaming the downward trends begun by former PM Meciar on the current government. We noted that many of the researchers assembled were formerly close to SDKU, and may be "hedging their bets" by chumming up to the party most likely to be in power in the future. In an interesting twist, when Smer chairman Robert Fico arrived to address the group he became the voice of moderation, telling the academics that no party is against funding for research and development and that the challenge is to identify additional sources of funding.

FICO'S ECON GURU WANTS TO DELAY EURO  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) During a meeting with Peter Mihok, the President of the Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry and rumored Economy Minister-apparent if Fico becomes PM, Mihok told us that Fico knows that Smer's economic reputation is very weak, and that he established the ASA think tank along the same model as SDKU's MESA 10. Fico hopes that ASA will provide a platform for the development of enhanced economic and social programs within the party.

[1](#)3. (SBU) On the Euro, Mihok said that Smer's approach has developed and changed over time, and that Fico now favors a slight delay in the conversion to the common currency as it would have a "negative psychological impact" on Slovaks whose salaries would look much smaller when converted. Mihok believes that Fico -- seeking to avoid this negative blow in 2009 (the year before an election) would likely delay introduction of the Euro until after 2010; according to Mihok, Slovakia under Fico will likely see Euro conversion in 2011 instead of 2009.

UNHCR: DUBLIN II WILL RESULT IN MORE CLAIMS OF ASYLEE ABUSE  
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14. (SBU) Following allegations by Austrian human rights groups that asylum seekers are mistreated and abused in Slovak detention facilities, Pierfrancesco Maria Natta, the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bratislava, told us that most of the allegations are "clearly untrue." According to Natta, the implementation of the "Dublin II" agreement in Europe -- which calls for intercepted aliens to be returned to the country of their first asylum petition -- will result in a spate of such allegations, as aliens who filed for asylum en route to western European destinations attempt to avoid deportation. While Natta says that isolated incidents of police abuse may have occurred in the past, the NGO allegations of widespread abuse - and even torture - are likely a result of Dublin II going into affect.

#### EXTREMISTS TESTING NEW MINISTER OF INTERIOR

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15. (C) According to a source at the Ministry of the Interior (ref B), Slovak extremist groups -- including skinheads and the nationalist group Slovenska Pospolitost -- are "testing" caretaker Minister of Interior Martin Pado, and are being bolstered by the lack of police response to their actions. Despite recommendations from working-level Ministry officials to crack down on planned extremist marches the weekend of March 10, the Ministry failed to authorize or deploy an effective response; as a result, a MOI source tells us, several groups of skinheads "energized" by the rallies took to the streets the night of March 10 in Bratislava and Nitra, where they were involved in violent clashes with young people resulting in several stabbings and serious injuries.

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16. (C) We raised our concerns about this trend with an SDKU MP close to the new Minister and his cabinet. He told us that he thinks skinheads are not a problem because they only attack "gypsies" and fight amongst themselves; he shocked us with the attitude that skinhead violence in Slovakia is "not a problem" for the average Slovak and was very defensive when asserting that no additional measures needed to be taken. (COMMENT: Fortunately, this MP will not run for re-election in June. In an upcoming meeting, the Ambassador will be pressing the Minister for greater activism on this issue. END COMMENT)

17. (U) Slovenska Pospolitost leader Marian Kotleba defended his extremist group's marches in tribute of Josef Tiso, the leader of Slovakia's fascist wartime state, telling journalists that "no one" took as good care of the Slovaks as Tiso.

#### DZURINDA WANTS TO HEAD EU COMMISSION?

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18. (SBU) A SDKU MP told us recently that Dzurinda -- aware of the possibility that the June 17 elections could end his tenure as PM -- has been meeting with European leaders to garner support for his possible candidacy for head of the EU Commission.

#### SLOVAKIA TO BRING BELARUSIAN STUDENTS ON STUDY TRIPS

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19. (SBU) As part of Slovakia's long-term efforts to promote democratic processes in Belarus, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education will begin hosting Belarusian graduate students -- particularly law students -- for study visits. The GOS currently plans to bring through three groups of 15 students for three month visits beginning in September.

VALLEE